Congressmen See Spending On San Clemente Justifiable

8/18/73

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Two congressmen who toured the Western White House at San Clemente said yesterday that most of the $2.4 million spent on the President's home and grounds appeared to be jusitfiable, but they recommended that all such expenses in the future should be submitted to Congress for approval.

Reps. Jack Edwards (R-Ala.) and Edward R. Roybal (D-Calif.), who toured Mr. Nixon's compound Thursday at the invitation of the White House, stopped short of a blanket endorsement of the federal outlays, saying that Congress may have to address itself to the question of imposing ceilings on such spending and placing a limit on the number of presidential homes that can be improved at public expense.

The congressmen did not consider another $5.9 million spent by the military at presidential homes in San Clemente and Key Biscayne, nor did they investigate an expenditure of some $300,000 by the Secret Service.

Edwards and Roybal, both members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Treasury and Post Office, questioned the expenditure of $13,500 for a new electric heating system in the palatial, Spanish-style Nixon home.

In a statement issued in Washington, Edwards said, "The Secret Service reported the old gas heating system for the home was unsafe, so I questioned whether the government should have paid for this."

In a news conference in Los Angeles, Roybal also singled out a federal expenditure for painting a flagpole at Mr. Nixon's home

"I think it's ridiculous to spend $450 to paint a flagpole. I would have done it for $150,"

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Roybal said, according to the Associated Press.

However, Roybal, who said he began the tour with a "very critical attitude," said that after viewing the "money which felt that the "money which was spent for security was well spent."

Roybal was an outspoken critic of the San Clemente spending during a hearing by the subcommittee on June 27, at which it was estimated that total costs for improving both presidential homes was $2 million.

On Aug. 6, the General Services Administration, the White House and the Secret Service released new figures that showed that the combined cost for security improvements and construction of offices at San Clemente, Key Biscayne and the Bahama Islands retreat owned by Mr. Nixon's close friend, industrialist Robert Abplanalp, was nearly $10 million.

The two congressmen said they spent three hours in the San Clemente complex and were taken through office buildings, the grounds of the estate and into several rooms of the main house, including the President's bedroom.

Another congressman, Rep. Jerome R. Waldie (D-Calif.), was turned away Monday when he attempted to conduct such an examination during a walking campaign tour of the state.

Roybal said that landscaping done around the presidential home appeared to be justified, and he specifically mentioned a palm tree that was transplated in front of a window.

"You could see that a marksman couldn't possibly hit the window where the President may be walking across," the Associated Press quoted Roybal as saying in Los Angeles.

In his Washington statement, Edwards said, "Outside the home, it was easy to see that the grounds had to be torn up by the Secret Service with digging for communications lines and having to repair and replace other lines."

Edwards said some of the expenditures "may have been a case of overkill" by the Secret Service, but he added, "I am not at this time prepared to say the expenditures were a waste. The life of a President is a precious thing."

Roybal said he and Edwards had inspected a bulletproof windscreen erected around the President's swimming pool, and decided that it seemed to be justified. He also said he approved of the expenditure of $5,000 for furniture for the President's office in the San Clemente home.

In a related development, the Orange County grand jury reported that it has found no reason to question the tax assessments levied against the President's San Clemente home.

There have been charges that the county assessor's valuation of the estate as being worth $1.3 million for tax purposes was too low in light of the $1.6 million it cost Mr. Nixon to buy the property, plus the $2.4 million in federal construction.

However, the California Board of Equalization has asked the county equalization board to investigate the taxing of the Western White House. The local board, which cannot be compelled by the state to conduct such a probe, has not yet acted on the request.